

How can I hear from God? Psalm 19:1-11

On Tuesday my brother and sister-in-law who are missionaries in Northern Thailand arrived to stay at the manse for two nights while on holiday and to connect with some of their supporters in this area. I don't know if you remember Tuesday evening but there was an amazing sunset? We had been sitting inside talking catching up and took a break in the conversation at which I remember getting up and turning around and looking out the window to the surprise of the sky being on fire. Now it wasn't a large Drury rubbish fire burning with lots of smoke, but the sunset setting the clouds on fire in a most majestic and awe inspiring scene. It was so amazing, my sister in law calls out to my brother to quickly come and see it, as the sun was fast going down. I went outside to be on my own to take in the picture that God had painted for me using the sky as His canvas. I'm standing there quietly with the sense of 'WOW' being proclaimed on my insides. And in that moment of solitude with the instant WOW factor (With-Out-Waiting) my insides are proclaiming close to the words of **Psalm 19**:

The heavens declare the glory of God; the sky proclaims the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge. They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world. In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun. It rises at one end of the heavens and makes its circuit to the other; nothing is deprived of its warmth.

This picture, this scene from the creator that I witnessed Tuesday night instantly brought on the WOW (With-Out-Waiting) factor from within having me praising God almost instantly just as David did declaring the majestic "glory of God". It was the Pastor Theologian Francis Schaeffer who said that "God is there and he is not silent." Such was my experience that evening. I had heard the voice of God speak without Him uttering a single word. In witnessing that scene, the experience was my spirit witnessing to both the truth of the Creator and the revelation I had received through His Creation, the revelation of the skies and the revelation of the sun, just as David had and testified to in scripture God's Word the revelation of God's law.

So, if we now ask ourselves 'How Can I hear from God', how can we each hear His voice today? In answer to this question from Psalm 19 I would say

Firstly, our Creator since the beginning of time continues to speak through what He made. We can hear God's voice in and through his creation. To clarify what I mean here is that we do not see God by looking at the sky, what we actually see and then experience in our hearts is the 'glory of God' as we gaze upon the sunset, the heavens in wonder of creation. But to say that we 'see' the glory of God as with our eyes is reading into what's actually meant in today's modern sense from a scientific human perspective whereas, David is actually speaking in this Psalm poetically of 'hearing' the glory of God. The words that he uses declare that behind the whole majesty of creation that is found in nature- there is a sound -echoed by the words of Francis Schaeffer once again "God is there and he is not silent." And words testified to by David, the shepherd King who would have spent many a day and night out in the pastures with the sheep, out in the desert listening to God speak, experiencing the sound of God's voice in the wonder of creation, through what God has made and then registered and written his response down in this most poetic Psalm as a praise offering to his Lord. Last Tuesday at my house the adults there testified to the same, and to others who I've met and spoken to since this week one of whom who took this photo on the power point slide. For each and every one of us it remains possible to do the same- to hear God speak through creation.

It is as simple to put into practice as taking a moment to consider something created by God whether it be, a sunset, a flower, a tree or shrub, a hill or mountain, lake or sea. Or maybe for you it is a bird or something else. You choose what it will be, then stop and take a moment of time to look at it, examining it in detail. Consider what it looks like, how it is made, its individual design. I do not know if any of you are artists or appreciate art, painting for instance. Over time if you follow certain artists and their works. As you become acquainted with the artist and their painting methods and styles, you often come to the point when you will see a new work of art for the first time, and without reading the signature, you know instinctively who the artist is because you have learnt from their previous works of the art- to recognize the Artist! Well, that's got to be a Colin McCahon or a Ralph Hotere, a Constable, Monet or Gauguin. It is the same with Creation, through what God has made, we can recognise the artist, or in this case, the Creator, and have God speak to us afresh, revealing to us the truth of who He is and just how relevant He is to your life today. You can stop, and in a moment... WOW... hear the divine sound of God's voice speaking through what he has made.

Something that we all could consider doing is to make this a more regular experience in our lives by building in a special time or place into our daily schedule to be alone with God, free from distractions, to consider what God has made, what God is doing in your life, to look out into the world and then mediate or pray and read from his Word which brings me to my next point of how we can hear from God.

Secondly, consider the Bible to be "God Speaking", and know that every time you listen to its words with an open heart, you are hearing from the Author of Creation. David from our Psalm obviously embodied this in his spiritual life and exemplified this in belief.

[Vv7-9] For David writes that what he has heard and taken to heart from God's Word- is perfect and trustworthy! He knew this from the Law of the Lord that he had read and meditated on. In his own heart God had revealed himself to David and was speaking to him, just as through the sound of creation, so that he does not *hesitate to celebrate* the life-nurturing, soul refreshing, joyful and purely fearful effects of God all wrapped up together- speaking to him through His trustworthy and true Word! Not only was the word trustworthy but it was 'firm' as well. Firm enough to endure throughout each following generation so that for generation after generation God would continue to speak and truly fulfill His purpose in the lives of those who honour him- simply in their approach to Him with a child like faith and open heart ready and willing to listen to God speak through His Word "making wise the simple". *Simple* represented by those with a childlike faith, trusting in their Lord and ready to receive revelation from the author of Creation.

[Vv10-11] And further to this, the following verses are another way of saying that there is nothing in this life, in our world, that could possibly match the worth of God's Word, and the value and rewarding nature of what it is that He has to say to us through His Word- God speaking through his Word.

If we will but take the time and have the attitude of heart to listen and hear what God is saying, then we will be greatly rewarded because God's words both have and hold an enormously rich value for our lives, rewarding us, if, we will take His Words to heart and apply them and seek to live his truth out in our lives.

Thirdly, to answer the question of 'How can I hear from God?' today, extra to this Psalm, a spiritual discipline that David practiced which serves to heighten our awareness and sensitivity to hearing what God might reveal to us through Creation and His Word is through fasting-coupled with prayer. I would like us to consider introducing the spiritual discipline of fasting into our lives during the period of Lent which I have also outlined in this month's church bulletin. This week I have my operation so I will not be preaching next Sunday, Tim Jollie is, but I still hope to be here next Sunday. Now, the following Wednesday February 18th is known in the traditional church calendar as Ash Wednesday which begins the season of Lent in the lead up to Easter. Lent began with early Christians setting aside a special period of 40 Days, not including Sundays in the count, before Easter. Different church denominations have continued this tradition in various ways since then but the motivation of heart has always remained the same and that is to pray and fast so that you might be more spiritually focused, to be aware of and experience our Lord and Saviour's death and resurrection, in a real and powerful way each successive year, growing in this awareness throughout the period of Lent and culminating on Easter Sunday. Setting aside 40 Days reflects for us as believers the 40 Days that Jesus spent fasting in the wilderness after his baptism in preparation for his three year earthly ministry.

I invite you to join me during Lent this year for a special time of fasting and prayer in order to hear from God, what God might want to say to us as individuals, households and as a church, from the Eldership to the Kid's Rock children because as the family of God here at DPC it is my prayer that we would in unity grow in the desire together to want to not only seek to focus on Jesus and to meet with God but to actually commune with our Heavenly Father, and in that place, and with an awareness of God, that we might be able to hear from God as individuals, families and as a church.

Now with regards to fasting, fasting requires that you give up something. That you will go without something. It could be that you would fast from food for a day of the week or a particular meal each day or one meal a week. Or you might choose to go without your favourite food or drink. If because of medical reasons you cannot fast from food then why not give up your favourite soap or TV program, or better still, give up TV altogether during lent. Technology wise you might choose giving up surfing the internet or your addiction to carrying your smart phone every minute of every day so that you can be constantly doing something on it.

You might even put aside your favourite hobby or pastime. You may know instantly what it is that you are to give up for Lent or you might want to take time to ask God in prayerful consideration of what He'd like you to let go of and go without during Lent. Whether it is food, entertainment, technology, or other activities, the important thing is that we take time out from the physical to focus on the spiritual. By giving up something that is very dear to us in our world, in a very minor way we get to participate with the sufferings of Christ.

Another important facet of fasting is that you would take the time that we might save while fasting, while going without or giving something up, and setting that time or an equivalent amount of time aside at another time of the day or week in using it to pray and read God's Word, meditate on it and listen to what it is that God might say to us.

Here's one encouragement I picked up this week that might help us as we enter into this period of fasting and prayer during Lent, and that is the wisdom and experience of Mother Teresa who said that when she began in her life the spiritual discipline of seeking to meet with and hear from God, she initially would spend 90 percent of her prayer time talking to God. By the end of her life, she was spending 90 percent of her prayer time listening to Him. This is a facet of our spiritual lives that we could all seek to grow in during this Lenten season. If you and I would consider setting aside some time, to listen to your Father's voice during Lent asking His Spirit to speak to us- He will!

As I, and you along with me, might choose to embark on this Lenten journey of faith to Easter, in doing so, please remember that these spiritual disciplines do not earn God's favour. Rather they have the effect of positioning us to receive what His grace intends to give. Which includes: through Creation, Scripture, Prayer and Fasting, God is able by the Spirit to speak directly to us, transforming us by His power- for His own glory.

To wrap up this morning I begin with this:

Will you join me, this term, on a journey together to Easter which includes an invitation to you to join me on any of the Friday's throughout Lent, beginning February 20th between 5 and 8pm, for however long you wish to stay and pray in the Chapel with me? There's more info in the bulletin.

Secondly, what steps will you personally take and apply to your life in order to experience God more powerfully this Lenten season when we consider what it is that we have learnt this morning of How it is that we can hear from God: through Creation, through God's Word, Prayer and Fasting?

Lastly I finish with this challenge: Will you in the process of seeking, meeting, communing with, and hearing from God, will you ask the Holy Spirit to use the season of Lent to transform you, to the glory of God?